

AUTOCRAT of the European ether.

Ruler of the radio reactions of untold millions.

Sir John Charles. Walsham Reith. First general manager, British Broadcasting Co., Ltd., in 1922.

Became managing director in 1923.

Appointed director-general of British Broadcasting in 1927.

And still going strong.

Meet him.

At your own risk.

His grimness may alarm you.

His size will stupefy you.

Six feet four inches of Aberdeen granite.

Shoulders of terrific breadth.

A square jaw.

Deep-set eyes that smoulder with perpetual fire.

A dour Scottish face, surmounted by a high forehead with rapidly receding hair.

The face that has launched ten thousand wireless programmes.

Terrible thought!

When you meet him you will be alarmed. And impressed.

You will change your mind about many things.

Particularly about the harsh criticisms you came prepared to deliver.

Unless you are the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made.

Like Sir John himself.

Anyway, why waste your breath?

"I don't like your National programme, Sir John."

"Try the Alternative programme."

"But I don't like either."

"Then—switch off!"

Only that, and nothing more.

Sir John is always brusque.

Even when he is conferring a favour on a friend.

Brusque and severe with everybody, including Sir John Reith.

Allows himself no liberties.

His smoking is limited to an occasional cigarette.

He is almost a teetotaller. Cider his deepest dissipation.

He limits his leisure—and his laughter.

His smiles are frequent—among friends. But very few people have heard his laughter.

Meet him at his Beaconsfield home.

Delightful house, set in a glorious garden.

The garden serves as an outlet for superfluous energy and emotion.

But clearing rubbish or sawing wood is the nearest he gets to gardening.

Actually he is a man without a hobby.

His real hobby-horse is the High Horse.

He rides it like an expert of the haute école.

If you know him very well indeed you say: "Come off it, John."

Then he dismounts with charming grace.

But don't attempt that sort of familiarity during official hours.

He can play the fool in his own house. But nowhere else.

He is a generous host, and can be a genial one.

But the genial side of him is reserved principally for use of his family and more intimate friends.

A devoted son, an excellent husband, a fine father.

With his children, boy of four and baby girl, he plays happily.



Radio Reith

A pen portrait of the Director-General of the B.B.C. who, in addressing Dominion listeners, intimated that listeners could have the type of programme they liked best. This portrait (by the Private Secretary in "Passing Show") might lead one to think otherwise.

Like a great mastiff gambolling among puppies.

Apart from his family and his circle of friends he walks alone. He has no cronies.

His clubs are the Athenaeum and the Royal Automobile. They would be.

He reads many books, but chiefly when he can learn from them. Biography for preference.

He reads as a student rather than for pleasure, although he can enjoy a good humorous novel.

The theatre does not attract. Films hold no interest for him.

The wireless set at his home is worthy of a Director-General.

And he uses it.

He can take his own medicine, and enjoy it.

Serious stuff appeals most, of course.

But, unexpectedly, he likes the dance music.

Physically he has worn well. His mental outlook is older than his years. Always has been.

He is always well dressed. Neatly and unobtrusively. Sombre colours to match his personality.

He eats sparingly for so big a man. His appetite is less than his inches.

Though a Scot of Scots he does not play golf.

Enemies find him a difficult man to hurt.

He is so self-contained. So sure of himself.

A man with the courage of his convictions.

Deep-rooted convictions; unlimited courage.

Critics buzz angrily around that massive head, wasting their venom. Mosquitoes attacking a rock. . . .

HISSES, shrieks, and groans oscillate the air.

"Give us less education."

"More entertainment."

"Give us brighter Sunday programmes"

"Give us a light-hearted alternative programme."

The firm mouth tightens. . . .

Sir John says: "NO."

"So long as I am Director-General there will be no fundamental change in the character of the Sunday programmes."

And that is that.

The Director-General's decision is final.

The public cries aloud for what it wants.

Like a child crying for the moon.

What hopes?

None.

Might just as well stop crying and be a good public.

Because—

"Here is your wireless entertainment. Take it.

"Or leave it!"